

# MRE Taste Test

*Airman staff goes tactical to spill the beans on meals, ready to eat*

by Airman staff

photos by Master Sgt. Efrain Gonzales

## Best of the Worst

OK, not every meal gets a four-fork rating. The troops in the field would string us up if we didn't at least give a double thumbs down to some of the meals. Despite their high nutritional value, there were two that we labeled "most likely to cause a gag reflex."

### 1. MRE #18, Cajun Rice and Beans with Sausage.

Yucky. Should be labeled "Fear Factor" material. This Cajun staple really missed the mark, that's a "garaunteeee." No amount of hot sauce can make it taste any better. "Even Mikey wouldn't eat this."

### 2. MRE #11, Pasta with Vegetables.

This entrée is like an aging movie star — pretty on the outside, but dead inside. "Causes instant gag reflex — and it smells like it's been in the package way too long."



**Though meals, ready to eat** don't come with fine china, after tasting 23 of the meals available to Airmen in the field, the Airman staff agreed they'd consider eating a few outside of the combat zone — the beef roast with vegetables for sure.

**T**he Airman staff "took one for the Air Force" when it taste-tested — all in one sitting — 23 of the U.S. military's 24 meals, ready to eat.

Yummy and not so yummy.

But as expected, the entire staff survived. Nobody got sick or hurled during the test. And many were surprised at their findings. But before getting to the results, let's look back just a bit, to a micro-sketch of military rations.

Napoleon said an army marches on its stomach. Today's generals would most assuredly agree with that.

But the little Frenchman didn't have "le meals, ready to eat." His troops found food on the hoof, so to speak, and foraged for chow while on the march. It was nothing new. Armies had done that for centuries. Not a good thing for local farmers. In 1812, cows, pigs and sheep from Paris to Moscow — all potential meals — trembled at the sight of the general's advancing army. Napoleon sure could have used a beef enchilada MRE on the outskirts of Moscow, that's for sure. Many of his

troops starved. No wonder he lost the campaign.

Today, armies are highly mobile and on the go day and night. Troops don't have the luxury of stopping to brew coffee or barbecue a cow. They have to eat on the move to stay focused on the mission. So their meals must be state-of-the-art, easy to eat and able to keep troops fueled in any situation or climate. Taste, of course, is a big plus.

There are a host of rations for all occasions: arctic, survival, long-range patrol, medical — even Kosher and Halal. But Airmen are most familiar with meals, ready to eat in the well-known brown plastic pouch. There are 24 varieties, each with about 1,300 calories.

But MREs get bad reviews from some troops, who complain they're not very tasty. OK, they're not the meals found at a four-fork restaurant, or even McDonalds. But they're well planned, top quality, nutritious, portable, safe and satisfying.

In combat it's tough getting anything better than that, GI. Besides, it beats chasing down your meal all over the Afghan and Iraqi countryside.

After several hours of tasting, Airman staff members came up with their Top 10 list of MREs — and the not-so-good entrées, too. Here's what they had to say.

## Top fork-earning meals

### MRE #19, Beef Roast with Vegetables



The real beef in this meal startled the entire staff. After tasting other meat meals, they'd grown accustomed to spongy substitutes. "It's a Midwestern delight — in a bag," was one comment. The potatoes, however, were a different story. Very pasty, they tasted like they came straight from a can. "But the thrill of real beef overcame that shortcoming."

### MRE #2, Pork Rib with New England Style Clam Chowder



The pork rib was so good and realistic, one taster said, "I swear I could taste bone marrow." And the thick and creamy clam chowder looked and tasted like it was shipped from Boston. The consensus: "The clam chowder is very tasty. But you need to warm it to really enjoy it."

### MRE #12, Veggie Burger with Barbecue Sauce



Surprisingly yummy. Hands down the most unexpected entrée in the batch. The staff approached the veggie burger like Bambi at a rifle range convention, timidly. But a taster said, "It tastes more like meat than the beef-type entrées. It has surprisingly good flavor. Definitely a meal I'd eat again." Everyone agreed. If only all vegetarian cuisine was this good.

### MRE #13, Cheese Tortellini



Tops the list for the Italian fare. "Smells great and is very tomatoey. It looks good, too — like a normal dish. It's creamy, a good meal, overall."

### MRE #15, Beef Enchiladas with Picante Sauce



The best of the south-of-the-border entrees. "It has a spicy-Mexicany taste worth trading for. The picante sauce has kick and mixes well with the enchilada."

### MRE #10, Chili Mac



Get what you pay for in this meal. No false advertising here. "Just what I expected — a good-tasting chili mac. An American classic — dig in!"

### MRE #3, Beef Ravioli



Another Italian meal in the "it's-hard-to-mess-this-up" category. "Not a bad deal. It tastes better than Chef Boy-R-Dee. And it looks good — always a plus."

### MRE #21, Chicken Tetrazzini



"Looks like a school lunch." Although the staff agreed it tasted yummy, the texture was a bit disturbing. "Sticks to teeth and gums a bit, but it's really good."

### MRE #16, Chicken with Noodles



An old reliable and close kissing cousin to chicken tetrazzini — and with the same disturbing problem. The taste was great, "but the consistency was kind of weird. It stuck together like cow saliva [Napoleon's grenadiers would have loved that]. But looks were deceiving."

### MRE #8, Beef Patty with Mexican Mac & Cheese



The mac and cheese side dish kept this entrée from falling off the list. The beef patty was unreal — as in not real. "It was kind of like a 'Mexican Sponge Bob.'"

### Want more info?

For more details about MREs, go to <http://www.dscp.dla.mil/subs/rations/meals/mre.htm>



### On the side

Most of the side orders are commercially produced — candy bars, snacks, powdered drinks and stuff like that. There are more than 40 different sweets, crackers, fruit, spreads and drink mixes. They make excellent trading materials, and can make up for a not-so-hot entrée if you're the unlucky owner of the Cajun or pasta meal. Here are some of our favorites:

- Mint chocolate chip cookie
- Cheese spread with jalapeños
- Fig bar
- Crackers
- Brownie with chocolate chips
- Shortbread cookies
- Wheat snack bread
- Cookies with M&Ms
- Spice pound cake
- Peanut butter